

Scioto County Domestic Relations Court

602 Seventh Street, Room 303, Portsmouth, Ohio 45662

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The State of Our Court

As Judge of the Scioto County Domestic Relations Court, I present this 2017 State of the Court report. Since taking office on January 2, 2013, many changes have been made. The last four years have quickly come and gone. One thing, however, remained constant, I am tremendously proud of my Court's commitment to extraordinary public service.

During my tenure, the Domestic Relations Court has improved its facilities and court services. Specifically, as one example, I changed the physical structure of the Magistrate's Courtroom so as to improve the safety of the Magistrate and staff, as well as improve the safety of our litigants.

As well, I felt that the citizens needing general assistance, did not always know where to go when they reached the third floor of the Courthouse. Typically, our litigants seemed to meander aimlessly in the hallway outside the Courtroom. Now, the Domestic Relations Court complex has a receptionist window and station that all citizens or litigants can approach with questions or concerns. I believe that this small change actually has lessened some of the litigant's

anxiety about being in the Domestic Relations Court.

Because my staff and I see many people who are experiencing life-changing events, I believe it is my duty to continually strive to make the Court and its processes less intimidating and more understandable for the citizens we serve. Because we are public servants and because everyone is entitled to access to their Courts, I have teamed up with the local Legal Aid Office to provide a once-a-month, "Do-It-Yourself", legal clinic to our citizens who cannot afford to hire their own attorney. I am proud to report that many members of our local bar association have volunteered their time to provide pro bono services to our legal clinic.

As always, the primary purpose and goal of the Domestic Relations Court is to serve families in transition. On behalf of my entire staff, I can report that the Domestic Relations Court is indeed meeting its goals. We will continue to work diligently to ensure the public's trust in our Court.

As always, I invite you to visit our website at www.sciotodrcourt.com.



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Successful Co-Parenting Class

As parents proceed through the process of obtaining a divorce or dissolution, it can be easy to become so involved with the multitude of decisions which must be made, one fails to recognize the impact this family change is having on the children. A two-hour *Successful Co-Parenting* class is required for couples with minor children prior to the finalization of their divorce.

This class offers tips on taking care of themselves, understanding the impact on children and how to be more successful in the new co-parenting relationship, which will ultimately remain the rest of their lives.

Treva Williams, Extension Educator, Family and Consumer Sciences with the OSU Extension, Scioto County,

provides the training each month for the Domestic Relations Court. Treva has worked for OSU Extension for 23 years and offers a variety of parenting education classes throughout the county. She is a member of the state-wide Healthy Relationships Team with OSU Extension and serves as the Director of the OSU Extension offices in both Scioto and Lawrence Counties.

Training and Continuing Education

In March, the Court hired Michael T. Hickman to fill the position of Court Bailiff. Mr. Hickman has proven to be a valuable asset to the Domestic Relations team.

Several employees of the Court have received specialized training and/or attended seminars related to Domestic Relations Court. These employees have attended the following:

Administrator – Domestic Relations Roundtable Meetings, April 11, 2017; National Center for State Courts - Court Management Program, March 2-4, 2016; December 7-9, 2016; April 26-28, 2017; June 21-23, 2017.

- **Mary J. Dimit**, Assignment Commissioner - Domestic Relations Roundtable Meetings, April 11, 2017.
- **Michael T. Hickman**, Bailiff – Adult Probation Officer/Bailiff Training, April 24-28, 2017.



- **Christina K. Kraft**, Court

Military Deployment of Magistrate Michael L.

Magistrate Michael Jones was recalled to active duty by the United States Navy last September and deployed for nine (9) months to Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Magistrate Jones served as the Deputy Staff Judge Advocate for JTF-GTMO and supervised a staff consisting of 28 officers, enlisted, and civilian personnel.

During his nine month deployment, Magistrate Jones was a key member of the 9/11 military commissions prosecution team and provided litigation

support for the 5 capital cases involving the terrorists responsible for the 9/11 tragedy. He also served as a primary advisor to the Joint Task Force Commander and subordinate commands on a myriad of legal issues, including the law of armed conflict, military justice, ethics and international law. Furthermore, Magistrate Jones served as the primary Detainee Movement Operations Officer for four (4) high visibility movements and the transfer of more than 20 detainees.

In his military capacity, Magistrate Jones has achieved

the rank of Commander and serves as a Trial Judge with the Navy-Marine Corps Trial Judiciary. He is one of only five (5) reserve Navy Judges in the United States Navy who preside over court-martial proceedings.



Magistrate Christine M. Scott

In September of 2016, Judge Buckler hired a temporary magistrate, Christine M. Scott, a local attorney. Attorney Scott filled the seat of Magistrate Michael L. Jones while on military deployment. Her duties as Magistrate continued until Magistrate Jones returned on July 12, 2017. We are very thankful and fortunate to have had Ms. Scott fill this position.

During her term as Magistrate, Magistrate Scott also attended and represented the Scioto County Domestic Relations at the Portsmouth West Middle School job fair. The job fair was designed to get middle school students interested in various positions that they may wish to pursue after high school. The students asked questions about the participants, about their education, job duties, as well as

many other inquiries.



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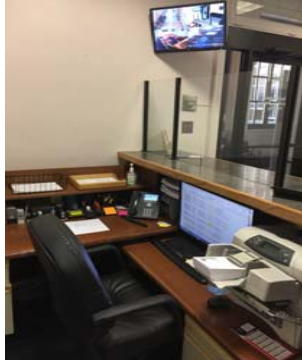
Reception Station

In January, 2016, construction began on a reception station for the Scioto County Domestic Relations Court. By creating this area, litigants now have access to a receptionist who can provide information to those individuals appearing for hearings before Judge Jerry L. Buckler or Magistrate Michael L. Jones. Directions are now provided to those unsure of which office or courtroom they need to be in. Forms can easily be acquired by self represented litigants. A security monitor was installed to benefit the attendant in knowing what is happening within the

Court's hallways and other offices of the Court.

Prior to completion of the reception station, employees had to attend to individuals outside the office in the hallway. Needless to say, confidentiality and security were compromised.

Judge Buckler is proud to provide these enhanced services to the citizens who visit the Domestic Relations Court.



Magistrate's Courtroom

The Magistrate's Office of the Scioto County Domestic Relations Court moved into their new courtroom and chambers in March of 2016. This space was previously administrative offices for the Court of Appeals. In addition to a larger space being created for the Magistrate's Court, there were separate spaces created for Court personnel as well as a conference room for attorneys and their clients to utilize. The courtroom now features a beautiful handcrafted bench with plenty of room for the Plaintiff and Defendant to present their cases to the Court. No longer

are the parties and their counsel on top of each other.

In addition to the renovations that improved the use of the Magistrate's Courtroom, the Court has also focused on security. The Court has added an additional secured door to control access to the Magistrate's chambers, as well as to Court personnel.



Fiscal Transparency & 2017 Technology Grant

The Court receives funding from the citizens of Scioto County through the Scioto County General Fund and is also supported by filing fees generated from day-to-day business of the Court. The Domestic Relations Court further supports the County's General Fund via a contract with the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services valued at \$243,214.21.

The Court operates with a flat budget, but with careful management, this budget supplies the needs of the Court without requesting additional funding.

In April of 2017, the Scioto County Domestic Relations Court applied for and was awarded \$19,382.04 in Technology Grant Funds from

the Ohio Supreme Court. These funds have been utilized to upgrade the recording system in Judge Buckler's courtroom as well as install a complete new system in the Magistrate's courtroom.

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Rule 9: Standard Parenting Time Order

Effective January 1, 2016, and upon recommendation of a review committee established by Judge Buckler, our Court's Rule 6.0 Parenting Time Schedule was revised and replaced with new Rule 9.0 Standard Parenting Time Schedule.

Changes were made regarding summer, weekend and overnight parenting times.

Confidentiality

Effective in the Spring of 2017, our local rules were modified to include a provision for the filing of "confidential" documents. Confidential documents include, but are not limited to, the following:

- IV-D Application
- Affidavit of Income and Expenses (Financial Disclosure)
- Poverty Affidavit
- QDROs or DOPOs
- Guardian *ad litem* Reports (please follow the Rule already in place)
- Medical Reports, Assessments, doctor's notes or reports, etc.
- Results of Drug Screens
- Mental Health evaluations, reports, etc.
- Genetic Testing results
- Vital Statistics form

These forms are marked "Confidential" and kept in a separate file to only be viewed by the Court and/or other persons permitted by Court Order.

Secretary Summit

Since taking office in 2013, Judge Buckler has strived to keep secretaries and other staff members of law offices up to date on changes in Court policies and procedures.

To make this happen, the Court has offered a Secretary Summit once a year. Staff from most Scioto County law offices, as well as offices in other counties who practice in our Court, are invited. A brief introduction of all individuals in attendance takes place since secretaries may work closely with other offices, but never realize, or get the chance to meet the people or person they have worked so closely with.

An agenda is composed and secretaries are given the opportunity to address topics they wish be discuss. The Court has always received positive feedback for this yearly meeting, Judge Buckler believes that by better preparing the secretaries who deal with domestic relations matters daily, the better prepared the attorneys will be in Court representing their clients.

We look forward to serving you. Our goal is to exceed your expectations with a focus on service and integrity.

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Respectfully Submitted,

Judge Jerry L. Buckler
Court of Common Pleas
Domestic Relations Division